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October 5, 2005
Immediate Release

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Environment Department Fines City of Santa Fe \$70,000 for Illegally Dumping Hazardous Waste at Caja del Rio Landfill

(Santa Fe, NM) — New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) today issued a Compliance Order assessing a civil penalty of \$70,000 to the City of Santa Fe for illegally dumping about 100 to 200 containers of chemicals from the city's wastewater treatment plant laboratory at the Caja del Rio Landfill. At least some of the chemicals are considered hazardous waste.

Over several weeks in May or June of 2004, city employees deposited the chemical wastes in a dumpster with screening debris collected on filters near the water intakes for the treatment plant, even though one or two employees raised concerns about the legality of doing so. The chemicals were ultimately disposed of at the municipal landfill, which is not permitted to accept any hazardous wastes.

Despite employee concerns, a plant operator ordered the disposal of the chemical containers in four cardboard boxes with the regular weekly waste removal over a period of about four weeks. A plant operator certified each waste shipment as containing only screening waste generated from the plant.

"It is troubling that a facility intended to protect New Mexico's water quality would jeopardize the state's environment by dumping hazardous waste when operators there knew it probably wasn't right," NMED Secretary Ron Curry said. "New Mexicans worked long and hard for landfill and hazardous waste regulations. It is unfortunate they went unheeded."

A city wastewater treatment plant employee came forward to the Department with concerns on June 6, 2005. The chemicals that were dumped in the landfill include mercury, carbon tetrachloride, and

potassium cyanide, as well as incompatible chemicals that produce violent chemical reactions when mixed, such as ammonium hydroxide and potassium permanganate.

In all, the Department cited the city for three violations. Two violations are for non-compliance with the state Hazardous Waste Act for failing to calculate the quantity of hazardous waste the treatment plant generated (\$10,000) and for failing to determine how much of the chemical waste was hazardous (\$40,000). The third penalty is for violating the state Solid Waste Act when the city shipped hazardous waste to a landfill not permitted to accept it (\$20,000).

“The state’s solid and hazardous waste laws are designed to protect both the public and workers from chemicals that could affect their health or safety,” Curry said. “This landfill is lined and thoroughly monitored. If contamination is detected in area groundwater, the city will be forced to take action to clean it up.”

The City of Santa Fe has 30 days to respond to the order and can request a hearing. For further information, or for a copy of the compliance order, contact Adam Rankin, Communications Director, at (505) 827-0314.

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